

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4070

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2386

JOINT EMBASSY/DAO MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR PINT LE

SUBJ: ARMY RESIGNATIONS - A MIXED BAG

1. SUMMARY: AS PERIOD ENDS FOR LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS TO RESIGN WITH SPECIAL BENEFITS, ABOUT 20 PERCENT HAVE DONE SO. GOL LEADERSHIP HAS HOWEVER FAILED TO MAKE OPTIMAL USE OF DEVICE AND MAY THEREFORE HAVE TO RESORT TO MORE PAINFUL MEASURES TO GET THE KIND OF OFFICER CORPS IT NEEDS. END SUMMARY.

2. CABINET DECREE LAW NO. 9 OF FEB 14, 1977, PROVIDED FOR THE VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT OF ARMY OFFICERS WITH SPECIAL BENEFITS IF THEY RETIRED WITHIN THREE MONTHS. FOR EXAMPLE, CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY COULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR FULL PENSION AFTER 15 YEARS, RATHER THAN THE NORMAL MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGES.

3. AS OF MIDNIGHT MAY 16 DEADLINE, SOME 194 OFFICERS, FROM A TOTAL OFFICER CORPS OF 950, HAVE SUBMITTED THEIR RESIGNATIONS. ROUGHLY 75 PERCENT OF THE RESIGNEES ARE CHRISTIANS, 25 PERCENT MUSLIM. (OVERALL IN OFFICER

CORPS, SOME 60 PERCENT ARE CHRISTIANS.) ACCORDING TO A RESPECTED SENIOR SUNNI OFFICER, WHO DID NOT RESIGN, THREE EXPLANATIONS ARE BEING OFFERED FOR THE IMBALANCE:

A. CHRISTIANS GENERALLY WERE MORE TECHNICALLY QUALIFIED THAN THEIR MUSLIM FELLOW OFFICERS, THEREFORE CAN FIND EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE THE ARMY MORE EASILY;

B. SENIOR OFFICERS, TRYING TO ESTABLISH A BETTER CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM BALANCE, HAD ENCOURAGED CHRISTIAN RESIGNATIONS, HOPING TO OBTAIN ACQUIESCENCE OF THE MORE EXTREMIST OFFICERS;

C. FEARING THAT THE SYRIANS HAD HOPED TO DEplete PARTICULARLY LOWER AND MIDDLE RANKS IN ORDER TO FILL THEM WITH NEW PRO-SYRIAN OFFICERS, SENIOR MUSLIM OFFICERS HAVE PARTICULARLY URGED YOUNGER MUSLIM OFFICERS WITH STRONG NATIONALISTIC LEBANESE VIEWS TO STAY ON, TO OFFSET FUTURE SYRIAN PRESSURES.

4. THOSE RESIGNING INCLUDE NOTABLY FORMER ARMY COMMANDER HANNA SAID, PRESIDENTIAL MILITARY ADVISOR BRIGADIER MOUSSA KANAAN, AND FORMER DIRECTOR OF SURETE GENERALE, COL. ANTOINE DAHDAH. BREAKDOWN OF RESIGNATIONS SHOWS 17 GENERALS, 58 COLONELS, 18 LT. COLONELS, 26 MAJORS, 31 CAPTAINS, 33 FIRST LIEUTENANTS, 19 SECOND LIEUTENANTS, AND ONE MEDICAL DOCTOR. LIST INCLUDES ALL 17 OF LEBANON'S QUALIFIED JET PILOTS.

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5. PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN RESIGNATIONS ARE THE NON-RESIGNATIONS, INCLUDING CHRISTIAN EXTREMISTS WHO ACTIVELY SUPPORTED THE KFUR FRONT DURING THE FIGHTING, SUCH AS LT. COL. ANTOINE BARAKAT AND MAJOR FOUAD MALIK, AND LEFTIST LEBANESE ARAB ARMY LEADER LT. AHMED KHATIB.

6. WE UNDERSTAND NEW ARMY COMMANDER BRIGADIER VICTOR KHOURY FAILED TO MAKE CLEAR IN RECENT WEEKS, DESPITE NUMEROUS INQUIRIES, WHICH OFFICERS HE REALLY WANTED TO LEAVE, WHICH TO STAY. THUS SOME OF THOSE WHO STAYED ARE OFFICERS THAT THE GOL WAS HOPING WOULD LEAVE, WHILE OTHERS WHO CHOSE TO RESIGN WERE BEING COUNTED ON TO HELP REBUILD THE NEW ARMY. ONE SOURCE REPORTS THAT FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTER BOUTROS IS DISMAYED WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE EXERCISE.

7. COMMENT: SOME GOOD MAY HAVE COME OF EFFORT, INSOFAR AS CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM BALANCE IN THE ARMY HAS

BEEN SHIFTED TOWARD THE LATTER GROUP. HOWEVER,
HAVING FAILED TO MAKE FULL USE OF THE OPPORTUNITY
WHICH IT HAD PROVIDED ITSELF TO PRESSURE UNDESIRABLES
TO EXIT GRACEFULLY, GOL WILL NOW HAVE TO RESORT TO MORE
EMBARRASSING AND POLITICALLY DAMAGING PROCEDURE OF
INVOLUNTARY RETIREMENT FOR SOME, AND PERHAPS REFUSAL OF
RETIREMENT FOR SOME OTHERS. THE RESULTS OF THE RETIRE-
MENT LAW APPEAR TO HAVE ADDED ANOTHER HEADACHE TO
THE PROBLEMS BESETTING VICTOR KHOURY.
LANE

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